

Claims:

Please amend the claims in accordance with the following:

1-16 (Canceled).

17. (Previously Presented) A clip assembly comprising:

two clips each having two end points, a proximal end point and a distal end point, the proximal end point and the distal end point being separated from each other when said clip is held in an open configuration and tending to return to a naturally closed configuration wherein the distance between said proximal end point and said distal end point is reduced;

two tissue penetrating needles each releasably connected to one of said two end points of a corresponding one of said two clips through a flexible member; and
a flexible connector connecting the other end points of said two clips together.

18. (Previously Presented) A clip assembly comprising:

two clips each having two end points which are separated from each other when said clips are in an open configuration and tending to return to a naturally closed configuration by reducing distance between said end points when the clip is in said open configuration;

two tissue penetrating needles each connected to one of said two end points of a corresponding one of said two clips through a flexible member; and
a flexible connector connecting the other end points of said two clips together; and

releasing means for normally keeping said two clips in said open configuration and releasing each of said two clips to become separated from the associated flexible member to thereby allow said clips to begin returning to said closed configuration.

19. (Original) The clip assembly of claim 17 wherein said clips comprise a wire made of a shape memory material.

20. (Previously Presented) A minimally invasive method of holding two tissue parts together, said method comprising the steps of:

providing a clip assembly which comprises two clips each having two end points which are separated from each other when said clips are in an open configuration and tending to return to a naturally closed configuration by reducing distance between said end points when the clip is in said open configuration, two tissue penetrating needles each releasably connected to one of said two end points of a corresponding one of said two clips through a flexible member, and a flexible connector connecting the other end points of said two clips together;

penetrating and completely pulling one of the needles through a tissue part and penetrating and completely pulling the other of the needles through an adjacent tissue part while said clips are each in said open configuration;

pulling the needles until each of said clips is hooked to a corresponding one of the tissue parts; and

allowing said clips to start to return to said naturally closed configuration, whereby said two tissue parts are held together by said flexible connector stretched between said clips.

21. (Previously Presented) A minimally invasive method of holding two tissue parts together, said method comprising the steps of:

providing a clip assembly which comprises two clips each having two end points which are separated from each other when said clips are in an open configuration and tending to return to a naturally closed configuration by reducing distance between said end points when the clip is in said open configuration, two tissue penetrating needles each connected to one of said two end points of a corresponding one of said two clips through a flexible member, and a flexible connector connecting the other end points of said two clips together;

penetrating and completely pulling one of the needles through a tissue part and penetrating and completely pulling the other of the needles through an adjacent tissue part while said clips are each in said open configuration;

pulling the needles until each of said clips is hooked to a corresponding one of the tissue parts; and

allowing said clips to start to return to said naturally closed configuration, whereby said two tissue parts are held together by said flexible connector stretched between said clips;

wherein said clip assembly further comprises releasing means for normally keeping said two clips in said open configuration and releasing each of said two clips to become separated from the associated flexible member to thereby allow said clips to begin returning to said closed configuration, and wherein said clips are allowed to start to return to said naturally closing configuration by separating said clips from said needles through said releasing means.

22. (Original) The method of claim 20 wherein said clips comprise a wire made of a shape memory material.

23. (Previously Presented) The clip assembly of Claim 17 further comprising releasing means for normally keeping the two clips in the open configuration and releasing each of the two clips to become separated from the associated flexible member to thereby allow the clips to begin returning to the closed configuration.

24. (Previously Presented) The clip assembly of Claim 18 wherein the clips comprise a wire made of a shape memory material.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21 wherein said clips comprise a wire made of a shape memory material.

26. (Previously Presented) The clip assembly of claim 17 wherein each of said clips further comprise a stopper connected to one of said two end points of said clip.

27. (Previously Presented) The clip assembly of claim 18 wherein each of said clips further comprise a stopper connected to one of said two end points of said clip.

28. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 20 wherein said flexible connector forms a loop when stretched between said clips.

29. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21 wherein said flexible connector forms a loop when stretched between said clips.

30. (New) The clip assembly of claim 17 wherein the flexible connector comprises a suture.

31. (New) The clip assembly of claim 17 wherein the flexible connector comprises a metal wire.

32. (New) The clip assembly of claim 18 wherein the flexible connector comprises a suture.

33. (New) The clip assembly of claim 18 wherein the flexible connector comprises a metal wire.